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SUCCESS STORY

Internet Access Lights Up Jalalabad

Public-private partnership provides Internet connectivity in Afghanistan's east.



Photo: USAID/ASMED

Students at Nangarhar Medical School at work in the new computer lab.



Photo: USAID/ASMED

The newly refurbished lab at Nangarhar University's School of Computer Science.

Internet access is a valuable educational and research tool, and a significant enabler of economic development.

A new public-private partnership, called “Light Up Jalalabad,” is bridging the digital divide by bringing internet connectivity to educational institutions in one of Afghanistan’s eastern provinces.

The project – a unique partnership between USAID, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the La Jolla Golden Triangle Rotary Club, Nangarhar University, and Afghan partners – is building computer labs with Internet access across Nangarhar province. With financial, administrative, and operational support from USAID, “Light Up Jalalabad” recently refurbished labs at the Nangarhar Medical School and School of Computer Science. Whereas the schools once had only a handful of functioning computers each, they now have more than 70 new computers and the equipment to maintain them.

NATO is providing funding for the Internet connectivity. These computers link users to resources across the world, giving them access to medical databases, business software, market information, and language training.

“There was no proper lab before. The computers were old and always had problems,” says Sheraz, a student at the Nangarhar Medical School. “Now we have modern technology. Whenever we face a problem with our textbooks, we can come to the lab, search the Internet, and find solutions.”

Looking forward, “Light Up Jalalabad” will refurbish additional computer labs at the university and begin work on labs at five local high schools and Nangarhar Hospital, the latter with the potential for telemedicine applications. The project will also create a central internet café in downtown Jalalabad for use by local entrepreneurs.

Internet access is a valuable educational and research tool, and a significant enabler of economic development. By increasing access to computers and the Internet, USAID is helping Afghanistan to improve the quality of its education system, develop its workforce, and pursue sustainable economic development through advances in science and technology.